

with the leadership of Mr. MICA and the leadership of both sides.

I don't do this often when I say I told you so. As chairman, with Mr. OBERSTAR, we tried to put the money in to identify the weaknesses of the bridges and to repair them, and we were unsuccessful. We ended up with a \$286 billion bill instead of a \$375 billion bill.

Mr. and Mrs. America, I believe it is time for us to wake up. We have to repair our outdated infrastructure, especially our bridges. You have heard statistics, 11,000 and on and on, how many are deficient. But there are about 500 in the same shape as the bridge in Minnesota right now that are a potential death trap to constituencies.

We have to, as a Congress, grasp this problem and, yes, lo and behold, I would even suggest fund this problem with a tax. May the sky not fall on me, but with a tax. Make it a 3-year tax. Make it a 5-cent tax, and they will say we can't do that. But I would suggest respectfully that the American people will understand the importance if we fund it and if we address the issue of the bridges. We should do this.

And maybe this is a wake-up call, and I hope The Post is wrong, that we all don't go back to sleep and watch football this fall and forget this tragic accident, because if we do so, then we are not fulfilling our obligation and our duty.

So I stand here before you today saying I told you so. But I am also saying let's act as we should to protect our people in every one of our States.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 10 seconds.

I want to thank the gentleman from Alaska for his leadership on SAFETEA-LU and for the participation we enjoyed together in crafting that and previous legislation. I thank him for his comments, with which I concur.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 1 minute to the Speaker, the gentleman from California.

Ms. PELOSI. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I thank you, Mr. OBERSTAR, you and Mr. MICA, for your leadership in bringing this important legislation to the floor in such an expeditious manner so we can remove all doubt in anyone's mind in Minnesota that we are there for them.

A disaster of this kind, I know, coming from California where we have had our earthquakes and others coming from places that had been struck by one disaster or another, that people wonder if the compact between themselves and the government is real, and today you are telling them that it is so. We can extend all of the sympathy in our hearts to the people who have lost their loved ones or who have been injured or have just been struck by the tragedy in such an extraordinary way, but we also have to not only extend compassion but present assistance. And for that I want to thank you Mr. OBERSTAR, and Mr. WALZ, Congresswoman

McCOLLUM, Mr. ELLISON. My sympathy to you and your constituents for all that you are suffering, Mr. PETERSON, as well from the State of Minnesota and our Republican colleagues from the State of Minnesota as well.

Sometimes in the course of events, there comes a coming together of a person and an event that is almost God given. And I think that is this case, Mr. OBERSTAR. No one in the country knows more than you do about the infrastructure of our country, the needs that we have out there, and the solutions that are the best ones. We are sad that your State was stricken, but maybe it is fortuitous for the country because it hit home for you. The spotlight is on your State. The spotlight is on your committee as we reach out with this \$250 million for the highway emergency fund. I think that the opportunity that is there and the knowledge, wisdom, solutions that you know better than anyone will serve our country very well.

I really appreciated the remarks of the gentleman from Alaska. We do have to make an investment in our infrastructure. In this case, no maintenance is the most expensive maintenance, as the people in Minnesota found out as some of their loved ones paid with their lives. So we have to figure out a way to pay as we go, no deficit spending, but understand that a capital budget is necessary to invest in the infrastructure of our country. It is what we owe the American people. It is about our environment, by relieving congestion. It is about quality time for families to spend less time on the roads. And as we learned, of course, and always knew but what was driven home in Minnesota, it is about the safety of our people.

Imagine, to be a mom or dad and to have a loved one leave home, a husband or wife, sister or brother, leave home in the morning or sometime during the day, of all the things you can protect your children from, of all the anticipation that you can have, you would never think, What if the bridge goes down? We want to remove that fear from America's families.

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I know, Mr. OBERSTAR, that you are in a position to do so. I'm sure you will let us know how we can all help. And, Mr. MICA, you as well. This is bringing us together this evening in a very special way. I hope it is a comfort to the families who lost their loved ones that so many people in our country feel this as a personal loss and are praying for them at this very difficult time.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2½ minutes to probably one of the most capable and compassionate Members of the House I know and the senior Republican of the Minnesota delegation, the gentleman, Mr. RAMSTAD.

Mr. RAMSTAD. I thank the distinguished ranking member, my friend, for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, no Minnesotan will ever forget August 1, 2007. No Minnesotan will ever forget the day the I-35W bridge collapsed into the Mississippi River. No Minnesotan will forget the tragic loss of life, the serious injuries, and the incredible devastation caused by the falling eight-lane bridge. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims, the survivors and their families as well as the brave first responders who have worked night and day on rescue and recovery operations.

My special thanks go out to the firefighters, the law enforcement personnel, the EMS personnel as well as the Minnesota National Guard and countless Good Samaritans for their heroic rescue and recovery efforts.

A special thanks, Mr. Speaker, to Governor Pawlenty for his great leadership as well as Hennepin County sheriff Rich Stanek, Minneapolis mayor R.T. Rybak, Representative KEITH ELLISON, and the rest of our Minnesota congressional delegation who have come together. I want to particularly thank the dean of our delegation, Chairman JIM OBERSTAR, for his extraordinary leadership in moving this delegation bill before the House today.

Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask all of our colleagues for their overwhelming bipartisan support to pass this crucial bill tonight so we can authorize funds for emergency repairs and reconstruction of the I-35 bridge that collapsed last Wednesday. Also, Mr. Speaker, we need the funds for much-needed emergency relief as well.

At this time of great need, Mr. Speaker, the good people of Minnesota are very grateful. We thank all of you for your support. We thank the Nation for their thoughts and prayers. We thank God that we live in a country where we can come together to help each other at our time of greatest need.

Mr. OBERSTAR. I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ).

Mr. WALZ of Minnesota. I thank the distinguished gentleman, my fellow Minnesotan, the chairman of Transportation, and, as the Speaker of the House so aptly put, no one in this country knows more about this issue. If there's anyone that comes close, it's the distinguished ranking member from Florida, a gentleman that as sitting on the Transportation Committee, I've come to see the wisdom of his words and the commitment to this country's infrastructure. So I think the Speaker of the House is right, two gentlemen that are showing incredible leadership on this and that our Nation should feel incredibly proud to have you there. I thank you both.

A special thank you to all my colleagues in this House. The citizens of Minnesota in responding to this have witnessed something that I think most of us here should be incredibly proud of. In less than 48 hours of this tragedy, this body came together, crafted a piece of legislation to provide relief,